SMOKE

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SMOKE

Waldo G. Kanfer

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LANDSCAPES

VIII

Not for long will man walk in this world
before death speaks to him and dread deflects him
from child's delight in flowers; and time is doom
and sounds and sights of dolour, come with the clucking clock,
strike the heart's midnight. Nor is it far,
as ravens and buzzards fly, from the cradle to the grave.
Thou hast, thou art, and then thou hast not, art not.
Look how the sunlight blazes on red blooms
whether they be in garden, or in field, or in the mind,
or on the undiscoverable and unremembered grave.
And thus I saw (walking forth) the crumbling stones
heavy with honeysuckle, and forthwith I remembered
though still a child the bones that gave me birth.

This was the west wind, over flowers, that softly came
whispering whys and whithers, wherefrom I went
kneedeep in goldenrod and became drunk with sun.
There the first angel came, flying from tomb to tomb,
winnowing grass and flowers, slowly with indifferent wings,
and followed, smiling, as I went in doubt from stone to stone,
perching on each in turn, and holding in his hand
a withered flower. And at first I avoided him
and moved away, ashamed, and with sly pretence of leisure
went to another grave, another tomb, another vault,
and saw the bones.

And then he gave me
the withered flower, and this I held in my hand,
stared at, and thought long, and it was he
who spoke. "This is your father," he said, "this is your mother

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and here are east and west, and downward-flowing water,
and the upward-going thought!"

And thereupon I pondered
of upward-going thought; and cast away the flower;
and deep in hot goldenrod buried myself and wept;
and thrust my hands amid the stalks and earth.

CONRAD AIKEN

AUTOBIOGRAPHIA LITERARIA

To walk affectedly so, with pants creased thus,
With such a tie, and matching shirt unmussed
Was the foam of youth's dream:—over the caverns and dark billows, these appearances
Glittered. Fame to descend upon the poet! Great loves to follow passion!
Calmness to rest on the mightiest seas!
I remember choosing for experiment
A lily-maid. I tried to gild her. Did you ever see a mauve-and-peach-and-glossy last year's
calendar-picture curl
In the fire which lit your winter up? I lost her; so her glow
Burned through four lines of verse I have become craftsman enough to disavow.
Did you ever try sincerity? I've gone barging through a portiere I did not see,
And so swept the cloth aside to get into a room I had not realized was there.
Oh, the truth is shocking when it comes too soon!
I hate a trollop who will not kiss, as I hate her constant attraction, her antique bloom.
Once I sold a pretty verse which said that this truth
Is too much of a snob to know any women. I don't know—
I think my greatest feat will be a poem which sings of all girls dangerous,
And terrible, and bright. I want to be a snob, too, and not to admit—
The only ones some chaps can have are low.

FRANK MERCHANT

THE DOGMATIC SESTINA

Misfortune finds him calm amid the ruins;
With vacant mouth and dispossessed face
Fronting the shaken shadow of the mountains.
No miracle volcanic shifts his end.
While others' lives would ask the peaks' remonstrance,
He points the fact, and names his life a point.

Unwilling matter would exclude the point—
Uncharted ghost amid material ruins.
Contingency evokes not his remonstrance
Who views phenomena with stupid face,
Who sees disturbance in the dust has end,
As has the line of these appearing mountains.

But linear lives defy the fact of mountains,
Presume the line of peaks a lengthened point,
And men a marshalled series to no end.
His soul reiterates itself mid ruins,
Ignores the flesh of its escaping face
That moves to sun and moon with no remonstrance.

Of sun nor moon he prays a god's remonstrance,
Unpurposed risen, that, beyond the mountains,
Daily they set, and setting, flail his face.
Completed light he knows a fabled point,
Yet views of sun and broken moon on ruins
No parable of panoramic end.

And linear men as points that would not end,
As pointless jokes requiring his remonstrance,
He views, and views their argued lives in ruins
Staged like the Forum 'neath his Roman mountains.

SMOKE

O Fools! who forced perception to this point
That simple start and stop they could not face.

Close now the sequence of his cloistered face
That stared the statued moments to an end.
Sunlight and moonlight fall upon this point.
Over his corpse now preach the dust's remonstrance
While keening women place him 'neath the mountains,
Whence he shall rise eternally from ruins.

J. V. CUNNINGHAM

INTANGIBILITY

There are those things which were not meant for words,
Which all the shepherding of tongue or pen
Can never gather in complacent herds
To pasture on a page, or yet again,
To corral in the cadence of a voice,
But which like stallions on a range of stars
Shall know their freedom and let hooves rejoice
In lightnings struck from Venus and from Mars.

Ah, there is much that I might say to you
Did I not know that in the utterance
Something would die which must not be so lost.
Silence alone shall keep me ever true
To beauty which is not mine to enhance;
And, if you have not faith, that is my cost.

W. H. GERRY

LESBOS

Neap-tide tonight, the sea breathes deep as I;
For the sun's influence with the moon's is locked
And the unquiet waves with motion mocked
Stumble along the edges of the sky.

I plot within the darkness for your soul
That shall not quite escape me at the last,
But all my thoughts are misty with the vast
Movement of seas that round these islands roll.

So Sappho leaned within the blossom-snow,
Singing the name of a boy gone from her,
And saw the foam of twenty beaches stir
The sands they'd walked upon an hour ago.

ANITA YOUNG

SONG FOR HARP AND FLUTE

The soft arpeggios of the heart take flight
  Under your hand
    So lightly thus releasing
Strings in whose stir was song for your delight,
    And the dim spirit's pleasing;
  Now that the land
Inclines to darkness we can never know,
  Temper your fear,
    Low flute forever calling,
It is even as the twilight of such snow
    As one knew not was falling:
  Sorrow is here.

ANITA YOUNG

TO HERMAN MELVILLE

(*Mid-Atlantic*)

Cast down from eagle heights, Tashtego stands
In a little box upon the iron prow;
Back to the bridge, two twisted metal strands
Carry the gull-like cry, a phone-call now,
To Ahab standing by the Iron Mike.
Between two decks, Daggoo and Queequeg strike
Their shovels upon fierce doors of glowing steel,
And wipe the coal-dust from their sweating hands
While twenty knots slip by the riveted keel.
So much is changed, O Ishmael, and yet
Who walks at night beside the quiet rail,
And stands and stares against the endless dark,
Shall see, like wind-drift blown across the pale
And eddying moon track, the slow jet
That lifts faint plumes upon the night to mark
The sullen presence of the great white Whale.

PHILIP CLARK

Subscriptions to *Smoke* are at the rate of four issues for one dollar.
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- Resurrection -
W.H. Gore